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American Art Journal.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JAN. 26, 1867.

PUBLICATION OFFICE, 806 BROADWAY.

GOVERNMENT PROTECTION TO ART.

A Bill has been presented to Congress, the purport of which is the protection of native artists, and the means proposed is the placing of a high duty upon all foreign pictures, imported for sale or otherwise into this market. The duty proposed is \$100 on all foreign pictures invoiced or assessed at \$1000 or under, and ten per cent. added to all amounts over \$1000. A tariff of this kind has long been needed, for the reason that the market has literally been flooded by inferior pictures, the ready sale of which has seriously interfered with the interests of our artists. These pictures are manufactured in France and Germany by the gross; well-known styles are imitated, and well-known names are affixed, and the good-natured and gullible public, always ready to grasp at anything of foreign manufacture, whether it be a live count or a very dead painting, believing what they are told and not understanding what they see, purchase the five or ten-dollar daubs at fabulous prices. We look in vain among the masses for judgment in Art matters, for even among the intelligent and wealthy, a true connoisseur of Art forms the exception to the rule; it is right therefore to protect those willing to purchase but unable to discriminate, from imposition and possible fraud.

The Bill before Congress, although drawn up and signed by a large number of our best artists, must not be looked upon as an indication of a selfish, jealous care of their own interests, to the exclusion of other well-founded claims. On the contrary, they view the subject from an intelligent and liberal point of view. They consider the introduction of good foreign pictures to this country, not only as a thing to be desired, but as positively beneficial. They exert a favorable influence on the best interests of art, and foster and extend a true taste, throughout each circle in which they fall. Such works excite a generous competition, for there is always something to be learned from worthy rivals. Our artists are therefore, ready to welcome good foreign pictures, let them come from whatever source they may.

With the poor cheap pictures the case is very different. These are imported by the hundreds, and they are forced upon purchasers in preference to works of American artists, because the profits to the vendor are immeasurably greater. They are imported for next to nothing, and are sold at prices a thousand per cent. in advance. It is clearly, therefore, the interest of picture dealers to

keep the works of American artists in the background, and to push the sale of the foreign goods to the best of their ability. But the evil is not confined only to operations in the way of regular trade; pretentious auction sales are got up—a grand flourish of names attracts the public, and hundreds of the poorest kind of pictures, find homes which they neither hallow nor ornament. The result is that the public appetite for pictures is glutted, and the beautiful pictures of our own artists, remain on their easels or around their studios, unsold.

It is time, indeed, that protection was afforded them, and we think the bill now proposed will effect the desired end in a great measure. We think, however, that the tariff fixed is too high. Fifty dollars on pictures worth one thousand dollars or less, and ten per cent. on all sums above that amount, would prove sufficiently prohibitive against the importation of poor pictures, and would fall less heavily upon works which no artist desires to prohibit. But we would rather that the bill should pass as it is, than that no remedy should be afforded to an evil which weighs so heavily upon the interests of so distinguished a class of our citizens.

ENGLISH OPERA—OLYMPIC THEATRE.

The brilliant success which has attended the performances of the Richings' English Opera Company, during the two past weeks, has astonished and dumb-founded the most acute and sagacious of theatrical observers. A moderate business was conceded to the enterprise, in advance, but, judging by the recent miserable failures in the same line, success was deemed improbable if not impossible. We felt assured, also in advance, that the company would prove attractive, and that a fair excellence in the *ensemble* would secure success to the undertaking. Not that we wish to claim any special prescience, or pretend to any wisdom superior to that of our neighbors, but simply on the strength of our conviction that an Opera in our own language is a desire graven upon the hearts of the people, and that whoever gratifies that desire with even a show of moderate excellence, is certain to win success, and could, if he had sufficient stamina, establish a permanent institution.

We do not assert that the Richings troupe is all that could be desired; but it contains most excellent materials, and the leading artists have qualifications that would fit them for first positions in any company. Miss Caroline Richings is an artist of great experience and unquestionable talent. She has a fine voice, a dashing and effective manner, sentiment and expression, and is an actress of grace, spirit and resources. Mrs. E. Seguin (Miss Zelda Harrison) is a young artist of much promise; her voice is fresh and rich, in person she is highly prepossessing, and she is making rapid

strides towards excellence, both in her singing and acting. Mr. Wm. Castle has a beautiful tenor voice of sufficient compass and power for operatic purposes. He is rapidly acquiring that easy confidence which will enable him to use his fine natural powers to the best advantage, and sustain him in the prominent position in which circumstances have already placed him. The same remarks apply to Mr. S. C. Campbell. He has fine natural gifts, a rich sonorous voice of beautiful quality and an excellent presence. The varied experience which his present engagement affords him is rapidly ripening his abilities, by giving him full command of all his resources. There are other artists in the company of more than average excellence, altogether forming a good working combination, that could be wrought into a satisfactory and even brilliant organization. The chorus though inexperienced, is full of fresh good voices, and the orchestra contains materials that could be moulded into practical proficiency.

It is true, that the operas were not produced with that care and completeness which the public would demand from a permanent institution, but there was sufficient individual excellence, and that general dash and *esprit*, showing a unanimity in the desire to do well, that carried weight with the public, and resulted in the brilliant success of the enterprise which we have chronicled.

Some of the papers, daily and weekly, whose writers are as prejudiced as they are unlearned, have honored this company with notices as false as they are coarse, such indeed, as could only come from reckless partisan pens. They have done their little utmost, which is very little indeed, to discredit the enterprise, but the public in rebuke of their snarling, captious falsifications, crowd the Olympic Theatre every night, and reward the efforts of the artists, with the genuine applause of paying audiences.

The engagement of the Richings Troupe at the Olympic Theatre triumphantly sustains our oft-repeated assertion that an Opera in the language of the country, is the one Institution needed in our city. We have studied the matter thoroughly, and can see its way clearly to a consummation brilliant and permanent.

HOPKINS' FOURTH CONCERT.—Mr. Jerome Hopkins gives his fourth concert at Steinway Hall on Thursday next. The programme is *recherche*, and will introduce a new contralto in the person of Miss Mary Smith, of whom report speaks favorably. The other assisting artists are Mme. De Lussan, soprano, Mr. J. A. Dawson, the new pianist; Mr. Eugene Trastour, pianist, and Mr. H. Mollenhauer. Mr. Hopkins intends on this occasion to produce Liszt's "Seconde March Hongroise," for three pianos, which will undoubtedly be of interest to amateurs and artists.